

STEVE COHEN
9TH DISTRICT, TENNESSEE

2404 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

TELEPHONE: (202) 225-3265
FAX: (202) 225-5663

CLIFFORD DAVIS/ODELL HORTON
FEDERAL BUILDING
167 NORTH MAIN STREET
SUITE 369
MEMPHIS, TN 38103

TELEPHONE: (901) 544-4131
FAX: (901) 544-4329

www.cohen.house.gov

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4209

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(U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

April 4, 2019

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Barr:

I read with great alarm that a notoriously racist symbol was found spray-painted near a building that was destroyed by a recent fire at the Highlander Education and Research Center in New Market, Tennessee. According to a press report, it is the same white supremacist symbol that was displayed by the man who massacred dozens of worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand.¹

As you know, the Highlander Education and Research Center is world renowned for its social justice work as well as its historic role in the Civil Rights Movement. Highlander played host to civil rights leaders like Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose assassination in Memphis occurred 51 years ago today.

I urge you to investigate this incident for violations of federal law as well as significantly increase the department's efforts to combat the recent rise in hate crimes and white nationalism across the country.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of hate groups operating in our nation reached a record high in 2018. According to the FBI, hate crimes increased 30 percent between 2015-2017.

In the wake of Christchurch, as well as domestic incidents in places like Charleston, Charlottesville and Pittsburgh, the display of this symbol in Tennessee is truly chilling.

¹ <https://www.knoxnews.com/story/news/local/tennessee/2019/04/03/christchurch-shooter-used-racist-symbol-found-at-highland-center-fire-iron-guard/3347678002/>

I would appreciate your keeping me advised of the department's efforts on this.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve Cohen', with a stylized, cursive script.

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress